

So what is it like to be bisexual?

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What does it mean to be bisexual?

We are men and women who are attracted equally to other men and women: physically, emotionally, erotically, spiritually or romantically. We can find long-term happiness with either a same-sex partner or a member of the opposite sex. Some of us understand our sexual orientation at an early age, but most of us need time to understand and accept that we can love either a man or a woman.

We are attracted to our partners for different reasons (personalities, common interests, physical features), but in choosing who we wish to be with, gender alone is not a factor. We tend to see the whole person, which may or may not include that person's gender.

The modern day bisexual movement began in the 1970's, as an outgrowth of heterosexual groups that were advocating sexual freedom. Early (bisexual) groups were predominantly male and members widely contributed to the gay-rights movement. In the 1980s bisexual women turned away from lesbian groups that were not inclusive of their bisexual identities, forming groups of their own. For many women, bisexuality was tied to their feminist politics. In the late 1980s, gays and lesbians began to recognize the bisexual community as a valid and contributing population within the rainbow community.

How does it feel to be bisexual?

The process of self-discovery is unique for everyone. People can go through a lengthy "questioning" or "curious" phase before fully understanding their sexual orientation. Men and women who have same-sex encounters are not necessarily gay or bisexual. "Experimenting" does not determine your sexual orientation. You may only know for sure after examining your feelings in several different relationships. Often, we come-out as gay or lesbian, only to reconsider our orientation after acknowledging our opposite-sex attractions. It can be a challenge to sort through these emotions, especially if we feel our opposite-sex attractions challenge our gay or lesbian identity, or vice-versa. We can only find peace with our bisexuality once we realize our emotions are part of our natural capacity to love both men and women.

Bisexual children sometimes read situations differently, or with a deeper meaning than their straight peers. They can also form interpersonal connections that others envy or judge as strange. Being bisexual is a gift; it will allow you to understand and appreciate things that many others can't. There will be struggles and challenges as you meet people who are quick to judge, but if you accept who you are, most of them will have no difficulty in doing the same.

If you are an adolescent, you may be using drugs, alcohol, the internet, video games, television or other outlets to escape confusing thoughts and feelings. Be honest with yourself and acknowledge your fears. Realizing that you are bisexual may empower you to take control of your life, even if your worries seem worse in the beginning. These "methods of escape" can hold-up important mental and emotional work, further prolonging the often uncomfortable questioning phase.

Bisexual youth sometimes think that it will be difficult for them to realize their goals in life if they take a same-sex partner. Life will not be easier if you try to set aside your orientation to live as a straight person. Denying who you are is a form of internalized biphobia. It's like telling yourself that a certain part of you doesn't count or exist. Some recklessly pursue heterosexual encounters to convince themselves (and others) they are straight. This behaviour is extremely dangerous and unhealthy!

Frequently, people read sexual orientation (in others) according to the partners they choose. As such, many assume we are either gay or straight, depending on whom we're with. As a population, we're considered somewhat invisible – and though we are neither gay nor straight, we are at a greater risk of discrimination when thought of as gay. Some (gay, lesbian and straight) question whether bisexuality even exists; this is a form of biphobia.

Bisexual people come-out at all ages. Many of us are in our teens or twenties, but others avoid dealing with their sexual orientation until much later in life. It may be particularly difficult to come-out after you've entered into a marriage – or lived until your senior years in a heterosexual or homosexual identity, especially if those around you do not understand what it means to be bisexual. Regardless of your age or circumstances, you deserve and require just as much support and compassion as bi youth. Accepting who you are is very important to your quality of life. It's never too late however, the sooner you can do it, the better your chances of avoiding the pain associated with hiding your sexual orientation. It may be difficult, but in time you will learn how to tell people that you are bisexual. Coming-out is not a one-time event; it recurs with every new relationship, workplace environment or social contact. Having a healthy outlook will help.

Bisexuality is completely normal!

All living things (human beings, animals, plants, fish, etc.) appear in nature with a wide range of naturally occurring variations. Human beings vary in skin colour, hair colour, height, left or right-handedness, weight, intelligence, etc. Just as society would normally expect that some people have red hair, are left-handed, or have blue eyes, it is also normal to expect that some of us will be bisexual.

Studies are finding that a person's sexual orientation is developed from any number of influences before, during and after birth. These influences, (whether genetic, hormonal, emotional, nutritional, environmental, etc.), act together during a person's growth and development to create, among other characteristics, sexual orientation and gender identity. We are all unique; there is no other person exactly like us.

Being bi is not a state of mind (you cannot choose who you are attracted to); it is a state of being (a real part of every person's make-up). Acting gay or engaging in homosexual behaviour will not make you gay. *Acting* is something we choose to do and we frequently change our choices to suit our immediate needs. A state of being is self-evident; it is part of us whether we accept it or not, and though we may temporarily ignore it, we can never escape it.

Being bi does not define who we are; it is one part of our identity that helps to create each person's individuality. There is a wonderful diversity that can be seen in all forms of human behaviour. Whether we are talking about sexuality, race, ethnicity, or personality, the diversity of all forms of human expression ensures that no two people are alike. When we speak of the

diversity of sexuality (i.e., sexual orientation, thoughts, feelings, emotions), we can also talk about how we choose to express our sexual identity. Some men may be more effeminate than others, whereas other men are more comfortable adopting (stereotypically) masculine behaviours. The sexual spectrum encompasses a wide range of gendered behaviours (from the very feminine to the very masculine), but these behaviours do not define who we are as female or male. They are simply one part of our unique state of being, and have nothing to do with whom we decide to love.

How did this happen?

No one knows exactly why we are bisexual. Scientists have conducted considerable research trying to answer this question. Current evidence would suggest that sexual orientation is determined in the womb. It may be genetic, but it may also be random chance. Until there is a clear scientific explanation, many people will continue to believe that it is a combination of both genetic and early childhood influences. We already know that many of our other natural tendencies, (special talents or abilities), develop this way.

From questioning to knowing

Some of us are aware we are *different* as early as age three. We sense it intuitively, but we also receive clues from the world around us. We may notice that we don't share the same attitudes or sensitivities as our peers. This *difference* may become more apparent as we approach sexual maturity, when we begin to notice our physical and emotional attractions. Some of us find this frightening and we may try to resist (or deny) our thoughts or physical impulses, even if these reactions confirm what we've always known about ourselves. Others experience it as a natural progression of who they are becoming.

Those who become aware of their attractions during adolescence may face a prolonged period of questioning their sexual orientation. They might attribute their feelings to the hormones associated with puberty and hope that it is just a phase. Others may consider themselves abnormal or perverse and wonder if they are being punished for some misdeed. "Questioning" is a normal process and it provides us with an opportunity to examine how we really feel.

Here are some of the common concerns of bisexual youth...

Am I normal?

Why me?

Am I sure? Am I imagining it?

How did I get this way?

What will people think of me?

Is there something wrong with me?

What did I do to deserve this?

If my parents kick me out, where will I go?

How can I hide it?

Does God really disapprove?

Maybe I can just not think about it!

Will I get AIDS and die?

Can't I just live my whole life as a straight person?

Will people take me seriously or will they think I'm just confused?

We live in a heterosexist society. This means that people's thoughts and behaviours are sponsored by the inward belief that everyone is (or should be) heterosexual. Some people will feel uncomfortable observing anything that contradicts this assumption. This discomfort is called homophobia. It's homophobia that drives local bar owners to complain if they see two women locked in a romantic kiss, or passersby to cringe when they notice two men holding hands. While we often celebrate the differences that make us all unique, society tends to judge sexual minorities. Perhaps this is because the public lacks a common understanding of sexual orientation; most people fail to see that it has variations, just like any other human trait. At one time it was not acceptable to be left-handed; social equality will happen for gay people, it's just a matter of time.

Another common concern is the biphobia that exists not only within the general population, but also in members of the rainbow community. Many gays and lesbians who understand and accept being gay or straight, have difficulty with the concept of fitting somewhere in the middle. Many of them don't realize that sexual orientation exists as a range of possibilities, like and other human trait. It has been said that bisexuals are responsible for introducing AIDS into the heterosexual population. This is of course false; the spread of the AIDS virus was just slower among heterosexual couples because of the greater use of condoms to prevent pregnancy.

You will most certainly face challenges however; the courts are on your side. Canada has taken a progressive approach to equal rights for people who are gay, lesbian and bisexual and mainstream attitudes are improving. Today, we share in almost every legal right afforded to heterosexual individuals. Furthermore, many people welcome our contributions because we are different, not in spite of it. Still the challenge to live free from prejudice can seem daunting.

Not every one deals with his or her sexual orientation during childhood. Some may not be in-tune with their emotions and do not recognize their same-sex attractions until later in life. Others may only awaken to this awareness after meeting someone who stirs them emotionally or physically. Some of us resign ourselves to living-out a heterosexual existence, which may lead to marriage and children. While we are able to ignore or manage our feelings temporarily, we cannot do it forever. Those of us who try often suffer in many ways, (physical and emotional health, inter-personal relationships, ability to achieve goals, etc.). Regardless of how good we are at pretending, our true nature will always surface.

Here are some of the questions and concerns of bisexual adults...

- 1) Why me?
- 2) Do I need to tell my partner?
- 3) If I choose to act on my feelings, how will this affect the lives of my children/spouse? Will they accept me...forgive me?
- 4) Will my parents, brothers, sisters and/or other family members stop speaking with me?
- 5) What about divorce? Do I want one? How messy can things get?
- 6) Will I lose my job? Will I have trouble advancing in my profession?
- 7) Can I afford to break-up my home?

- 8) How will others speak of me?
- 9) I know very little about the GLBT community and what I do know doesn't feel comfortable. Perhaps I'm wrong!
- 10) Am I going to hell?

Safely, in-the-closet

Many of us keep our fears and self-doubts private while we are questioning. Once we accept our sexual orientation, we may have other reasons for keeping the information private. This period of secrecy is called living "in-the-closet".

There is nothing wrong with keeping your sexual orientation private. We all need some time to get used to the idea ourselves; just remember, if you are struggling emotionally, you don't have to go through it alone. Consider sharing the news with someone you trust. If you tell a friend, be aware that you might not (truly) know their attitudes towards bisexuality. It may be best to test their reaction before telling them outright. Mention that you have a family member that might be gay or bi, or comment on something you read related to "GLBT-rights" then watch their reaction. Some people must rely on the safety of the closet. Not all school or work environments are safe. If you feel it is important to remain "closeted", tell yourself it is temporary; a means of survival. The closet may be safe, but it is not healthy. It will deprive you of your right to live freely and it will impose undue stress, possibly eroding your self-esteem. If you must stay there for now, begin thinking of when it might be safe to "come-out".

Ways We Remain Closeted

- 1) Withdrawing from friends and family members
- 2) Lying to explain our behaviour, activities and relationships
- 3) Talking only about past relationships that are heterosexual
- 4) Making sexual comments about members of the opposite sex
- 5) Criticizing gay and bisexual people to steer attention away from ourselves (this can especially hurt)
- 6) Concealing pictures, letters, notes and magazines that could offer a hint
- 7) Reducing our same-sex partner's status to "friend" or family member (like cousin or brother)

Coming-out & self-acceptance

Self-acceptance is vital to our sense of well-being. To live healthy productive lives we must let go of any internal biphobia (fear of ourselves) that could limit our ability to tap into our fullest potential as human beings. We must also love ourselves before we can love anyone else; otherwise we are likely to burden them with the negative feelings associated with our personal struggle. Achieving full self-acceptance can be a life-long journey, but some of us are able to set aside the important issues at an early age.

Coming-out is an important part of self-acceptance. It is a process that can stir-up many emotions, some of which can be difficult to deal with alone (i.e., low self-esteem and fear of

rejection or abandonment). It would be helpful to establish a support network of friends, family members and trusted advisors to help you through any difficult times.

We come-out for many reasons: to openly acknowledge who we are, to cease living in secrecy and to share an important piece of our lives with those who matter most to us. We do not come-out to hurt anyone, even if we disclose the information in anger.

Before we come out to others, we must acknowledge and freely accept who we are; we must “come out” to ourselves. The coming-out process is different for everyone, but most people experience these five stages:

Five Stages of Coming-Out to Yourself

1) Self-awareness and acknowledgement

- i. Individuals are still questioning
- ii. Obtaining information, looking for answers

2) Telling others

- i. We often tell a close friend first
- ii. If we are in our teens, a trusted adult is often next; possibly a parent
- iii. Negative experiences can send us back to Stage 1
- iv. Some of us are so relieved, we want to tell the whole world; others are very private
- v. We might begin questioning gay, lesbian and stereotypes to decide who we are in relation to what we know (or have heard)

3) Reaching out to other gay, lesbian and bisexual men and women

- i. Begin searching for people who are similar
- ii. Connecting with the local GLBT community

4) Forming healthy relationships with other GLBT persons

5) Complete self-acceptance

- i. Open, not defensive, content with ourselves
- ii. Willing & able to help others

Accepting your sexual orientation can provide you with enormous relief, boosting your self-confidence and providing you with a better understanding of who you are. Still, we face issues that most others will never experience. Society presents many challenges that we must rise above in order to live happy and productive lives (i.e., discrimination, prejudice, negative attitudes). These confrontations can make life more difficult however, more people (GLBT and straight) are taking a stand against sexual discrimination and many of these battles are being fought and won.

Coming-out to loved-ones

Things to Consider Before Telling Your Parents, Spouse and Children

Coming-out to loved ones is a natural step on our journey, but it can also mark one of the most difficult periods in our lives. It may feel like a gamble, that's because it is; not everyone you love may be willing to accept who you are. You may feel selfish or guilty in sharing this news, especially if it causes them any pain or anguish. It may be difficult for them to adjust however; you are inviting them to see you, as you see yourself. You are giving them a gift, even if it takes them a while to see it this way.

Whether you realize it or not, you've been part of the coming-out process for quite a while. It began with the first moment you noticed you were different and it has taken time for you to understand the nature of that difference. Your family members are about to join you in this awareness, whether they want to or not. They may expect you to help them understand, but sometimes you won't have the answers they're looking for. It's okay let them know you are still learning. Be patient; do not expect them to accept the news right away, although some of them may. Give them time to digest the news, just as you have needed time to fully grasp things yourself. Your parents have long held a vision of how your life would unfold, they need time to modify their expectations. If you are married to a straight spouse, the news is likely to signal important changes ahead. It will take time for her to adjust.

Take Stock, Check Your List

Before you come-out to anyone significant, it may be a good idea to take stock of where you are in life and to how that person might react. This is not to discourage you from coming-out; it is to help you prepare for the possible outcomes. If you are in a heterosexual marriage, you may have to find a place to stay until you and your spouse can decide the next steps. If your parents are extremely upset, you may require alternate financing for university. Although it is difficult to predict exactly what will happen, you may have some reasonable expectations to draw from. Here is a list of things to consider before coming-out to a loved one:

Coming-out Check List

- 1) Why now?
- 2) Am I prepared for rejection?
- 3) Who else will automatically become informed?
- 4) What are his or her attitudes towards sexual diversity?
- 5) What am I going to say?
- 6) Do I have support?
- 7) Can I give him or her time to adjust?
- 8) Can I teach and support them?
- 9) How will this ultimately help me?

General Tips for Coming-out

You may be very nervous about telling family members that you are bi, but here are a few strategies that can help you decide what to say and when to say it:

- 1) Don't be rushed, timing is important. Try to pick a quiet time of the day that will allow everyone who is involved to focus on the discussion and any questions that follow
- 2) Tell them there is something you feel they ought to know. This says that you are making a deliberate effort to share important news
- 3) Keep your opening statements brief. If you want to start with, "For a long time, I have felt..." or any other lead-in, keep it to two sentences – or less! The anticipation may be worse than actually hearing the news
- 4) Be clear and direct. Say the words, "Mom and Dad, I am bisexual." If you are telling young children, read the section on "*Coming-out to your Dependant Children*"
- 5) If they react poorly tell them you understand that this information is difficult to hear
- 6) Explain that it has taken you a lot of time to understand it yourself, so you realize that it will take them some time too
- 7) Try to answer their questions, but tell them you may not have all the answers

If the exchange goes poorly, don't fret. It doesn't mean they will never accept you. They may just need time to absorb the news and think about what it means to their relationship with you.

Coming-out to parents

The relationship we have with our mother and father can affect us at every stage of life. When we are young, it is very difficult to separate how they feel about us from how we feel about ourselves. As we age, their opinions seem to matter less and yet, there is a place in our hearts that yearns to know they accept us for who we are. Fortunately, most parents do accept their bisexual children.

Here is a list of common fears people experience before coming-out to their parents:

Young adults may wonder:

- 1) How will they react? (anger, tears, etc.)
- 2) Will my parents stop loving me?
- 3) Will they think I'm abnormal? (sick, a freak, stupid)
- 4) Will they think I'm confused? (too young to know, misguided, influenced by someone else)
- 5) Will they throw me out of the house?
- 6) Will they withdraw their financial support? (university tuition, food, clothes, shelter)
- 7) Will our home life become unbearable?

Adult children may wonder:

- 1) Will I lose my relationship with my parents? (cease talking, visiting)
- 2) How will they treat my same-sex partner?
- 3) How will they judge me?

- 4) How will they speak of me with other family members? (brothers, sisters, grandparents, my spouse or children)
- 5) Will they blame themselves? (We often wish we could protect our parents)

Young adults may put-off telling parents until they become independent. Older adults may try to shelter their aging parents, or avoid telling them altogether. The fear of losing important relationships and hurting the people we love can create a vast emotional separation between them and us. Coming-out is an opportunity to create a deeper and more meaningful connection however, it's a risk that we should take only when we're ready.

Parents must also come-out

Parents have difficulty accepting things they don't understand about their children. Initially, some parents reject the idea their child is bisexual rather than face the fears they associate with the truth. Parents can experience a coming-out process of their own. There is an important purpose to this experience: it forces them to take stock of everything they think is relevant to the situation and it provides them with an opportunity to find the answers they seek. At times, it may seem like your parents will never change (their attitudes) and you may wonder if they will ever come to terms with your sexual orientation. Try to remember, they are not standing still; they are moving through this transition in the only way they know how. In many ways, their experience mirrors the stages of grief. They must grieve the loss of the life they expected for you so they can make room for a new vision - one that can bring you true happiness. One day this will likely make sense to them, even if it does not seem possible right now. Give them time to grow as a people - and as parents!

Five Stages of Coming-out for Parents

1) Shock

- i) Shock may last anywhere from a few minutes to a couple of weeks
- ii) Parents may think that you have changed, it will take them some time to realize this is not true
- iii) Although some parents suspect, hearing the words can still feel like a "jolt" to the senses

2) Denial

- i) They may cry, it's better if they express these emotions even though it is difficult to watch their pain
- ii) They may tell you you're confused. Don't get angry, some parents need to consider this possibility. Remain calm, but assure them you know your own feelings
- iii) They may think a psychologist can help. Counseling can be useful for anyone who is unable to cope with the reality of sexual diversity. This includes you, your parents, your spouse or any other family members. A psychologist cannot make you straight. Any professional counselor will not entertain such ideas. Bisexuality is not listed among the clinical disorders that merit treatment

- iv) It's okay if at first, they do not wish to discuss it. Parents sometimes need time and space to sort through complex realities concerning their children. Try not to see this behaviour as evasive or pretending the situation does not exist. They will signal you when they are ready to move forward
- v) Your parents may not be "together" in their attitudes toward bisexuality. Do not play one parent against the other. The key to acceptance is education and all of you may have a lot to learn. Try to respect and support each other's growth

3) Anger and Guilt

- i) It is normal for parents to feel angry. They might direct it towards you, your friends, your partner or even your other parent. Anger is a demonstration of fear and/or guilt they could be experiencing for any number of reasons. They may wonder...
 - What did I do wrong?
 - Why didn't I see this coming?
 - What else am I going to find out?
 - How long did my child suffer before telling me?
 - How will others react?
 - I am not equipped to handle this.
- ii) They may rethink the pregnancy, looking for answers. Any possible answer might convince them this could have been prevented – or still could be fixed. They have done nothing wrong and there is nothing to fix. Bisexual people have always existed (and will always exist). It's completely natural and expected that a portion of the population will not be gay or straight.
- iii) Single parents can experience a greater sense of guilt if they believe their children are disadvantaged in any way. Single parents do not raise more bi children than coupled parents.
- iv) Remind them, no one is to blame; you can and will have the life of your choosing. It will not unfold exactly as they once thought; it will simply be different.

4) Making Decisions - Three Possible Routes:

Once they've had time to fully absorb the news and they are secure in the fact that nothing is about to change, they will begin redefining their sense of who you are and who you are becoming. Everything they've learned up to this point will be called into play as they add this new layer to the day-to-day interaction they have with you. The parent-child relationship usually takes one of the following paths:

- i) Supportive: When parents focus on their child's well-being, many other issues become relatively unimportant. This doesn't mean parents now understand what it means to be bi, or that they accept the idea. It means that whatever obstacles lay ahead, the health and welfare of their son or daughter is of the utmost importance. Such families have an excellent chance of nurturing a healthy attitude in all family members.

In young families, supportive parents set the tone for younger siblings. In older families, they can have a positive impact on members of the extended family.

Individually, these parents are open to learning and they don't mind searching for information on their own. Supportive parents tend to be supportive partners; they are likely to help each other along the way.

- ii) Resigned or Conditionally Supportive: Parents who tolerate their bi children often see themselves as *accepting* because they remain on speaking terms and continue to support their child in other ways. These parents create uncomfortable conditions by imposing restrictions or using sarcasm to communicate their discomfort. Some parents won't allow their child's partner to visit, or they use insensitive humour to embarrass them in front of others. Adult children will spend as little time as possible with their parents; bi teens often keep all details of their life private. Children living in these homes are often afraid their parents will ask them to leave, or cut off any financial support for post-secondary education.
- iii) Unsupportive or Judgmental: Parents who do not support their bisexual children not only lose a vital connection that is important to their own well-being, they make it more difficult for their children to transition into a healthy adult life. Some of these parents lose the respect of other family members who support the individual who is bisexual. Parents may withdraw into a "closet" of their own by avoiding social interaction with friends and family members.

5) Acceptance

A truly accepting parent would rather change society than change their child. Not all of them get this far; many remain supportive but privately wish their child could become heterosexual. Coming-out for parents, means not only accepting their child, but also themselves as parents of a bisexual son or daughter. They probably won't share the news with everyone they know (although some parents do), but they will no longer hide it. Your sexual orientation will not feel like a burden; they will recognize it as a gift, part of the unique package that makes you special to them.

Coming-out to your straight spouse

Telling your straight spouse can mean a variety of things depending upon what you hope to achieve. Some tell their spouse because they wish to share an important part of who they are with someone they love. Others wish to act on their extra-marital attractions and telling their spouse is a difficult but honest step forward. Even if you have no desire to act on your attractions, you may be struggling with the knowledge that you are bisexual and long to know if your spouse will accept you.

Some spouses accept their bisexual partners, especially if there is no need to change how the marriage functions. However, others find bisexuality difficult to understand and they may lose confidence in your commitment to the relationship. While time and perhaps counseling may help, you would be well advised to consider how your life might change with coming-out. Partners who share honestly of themselves and fully accept each other tend to have the strongest and most loving relationships, but not everyone is ready for this level of openness.

Telling your straight spouse can mean sharing the news with everyone who is important to you, all at the same time: parents, siblings, in-laws, children, married friends and possibly work colleagues. You may be forced to face issues that are difficult enough all on their own:

marriage breakdown, relocation, isolation, rejection and questions about your emotional stability or fitness as a parent.

Here are some tips you may wish to consider:

1) **Make sure you have someone who will support you.**

Do not attempt to handle this situation alone. Tell a friend, sibling, attend a support group like PFLAG or discuss your situation with a professional counselor. You will need someone who is willing to listen.

2) **Try not to rely on your spouse for support.**

He or she may require support for their own emotional well-being; it is not fair to place any additional expectations on them.

3) **Be clear and honest in answering his or her questions.**

Your spouse may accuse you of concealing your sexual orientation. If you wish, explain how you made your choices. Be honest and speak from your heart. People do not typically hide their sexual orientation to trap or hurt others; they do it to hide from themselves and to gain acceptance from the people they value. People make choices that seem right to them - based on everything they know in that moment. It only makes sense; who would consciously choose a painful outcome? If you believe that marriage was the right decision for you at the time, say so – and try to be okay with that. Coming-out is a process; we know who we are, when we know who we are – and not a moment sooner. Not everyone fully understands with their own wants and desires. Your honesty will help set the tone for all future dealings, even if your spouse does not like your answers.

4) **Safeguard yourself and your family.**

Do not accept verbal or physical assault from your spouse: leave, call a friend or contact the police if necessary. Your spouse may become very emotional; make sure you protect your personal safety. Leave if you must, but call someone who can tend to your spouse. You may be emotionally upset yourself, so it may be wise to plan for his or her reaction. Do not leave young children in the care of anyone who is emotionally distraught. Arrange for someone to look after them so that the two of you can focus on your discussion.

5) **Apologize if you have mistreated him or her in anyway, but don't apologize for being bi.**

At some point, your spouse will ask if you have been unfaithful. Tell him or her the truth; they have a right to know. They may wish to undergo testing for STDs. This is a valid reaction whenever extramarital sex occurs.

Ask yourself, "Have I dismissed or rejected my spouse while trying to work through issues pertaining to my sexual orientation? If you can say yes, you might consider apologizing and telling him or her that it wasn't their fault. Sexual rejection can impact on their self-esteem; they may already think they are undesirable. You can help them to understand that this is not true. Explain that you were not rejecting them, but rather a "way of being" that does not fully represent who you truly are.

You may feel consumed by guilt or shame. This is a natural reaction to a situation no one would choose to experience. It may be difficult to separate the emotional drain of dealing with your sexual orientation, from the combined anxiety of coming-out to your family. You may require some professional counseling to help you process these emotions.

Five Stages of Acceptance for Straight Spouses

Everyone processes life changing news in his or her own way and yet, many straight spouses experience a common healing process. Here is a brief overview of the thoughts, concerns and emotions many straight spouses work through, while coming to terms with their partner's sexual orientation.

1) Shock & denial, and/or validation of suspicion

How your spouse reacts to hearing you are bi will depend on the following:

- i) His or her basic personality (emotional well-being, ability to cope)
- ii) The type of relationship you share (healthy & supportive vs. dysfunctional & abusive)
- iii) How he or she perceives you as an individual (reliable & honest vs. self-centered & manipulative)
- iv) How he or she perceives or defines themselves in relation to you and your marriage
- v) How he or she sees this news changing their life

Your spouse may express intense anger or grief, even if he or she already suspects you are not straight. Often, people have a good sense of the truth, but choose to dismiss it as part of their imagination. If this is the case, he or she will have an easier time comprehending the situation, even if his or her initial reaction is explosive. Not everyone reacts with anger. Some may feel very sad and desperately try to negotiate a compromise that will hold the marriage together. Others may be relieved, having suspected for a long time. If you've ever shared the possibility that you might be gay, your spouse may have lived with a certain level of insecurity throughout your marriage. Your news is not something he or she longs to hear, but at least she can let go of the worry.

2) Reacting to the news

Your spouse may fall into a period of emotional turmoil marked by anger, low self-esteem and self-doubt. He or she may wonder if anything in your relationship was real, or if it was just a smoke-screen for you to hide behind. They may ask themselves, "Why didn't I see this coming?" or "Why now? Did I do something to cause this?"

Straight spouses can dwell on past experiences that could have provided "clues". You may be called to answer for the past in many ways. If you are comfortable with responding to such inquiries, do so in a limited capacity. Don't make it a habit to measure past events, it's not productive dialogue and it can even do more harm than good. Most of these queries are really just one question: "Was any of our life together real?" If you entered into the marriage with love in your heart and a genuine desire to make it work, then tell him or her all of it was real; you have just grown into a fuller understanding of who you are and this does not render the past invalid.

Your spouse is using this period to absorb the meaning of your news and he or she is going to feel angry or spiteful. Fully comprehending your sexual orientation is key to making sound decisions concerning the future. It is better that all information comes forward now, so there will be no surprises to undermine any trust that can be rebuilt. Trust is very important, even if you decide to divorce.

3) Making decisions

Once your spouse accepts that things have permanently changed, he or she may be able to proceed with making decisions about the future. If you share any common desire to continue with the marriage, you may both begin deliberating the issues that will affect how you will function as a couple, (i.e. fidelity, trust, sex, etc.). If you plan to divorce, he or she may be ready to consider items of particular importance. Making decisions does not mean your spouse is no longer hurt or angry; it means they are ready to move forward with the decisions involving you. He or she may still face a great deal of confusion and self-doubt before they are ready to move forward individually.

4) New understanding and healing

At some point your spouse will realize that you did not *just* become bisexual; you have been this way your whole life. He or she may begin to understand that each of you has come to this relationship from different realities. This awareness may allow them to cast new light on the past and present, perhaps allowing him or her to reclaim part of his or her identity and self-confidence. If he or she has been blaming him or herself, they may be ready to let go of some of this pain.

5) Moving forward with life

When your spouse is ready to take positive steps in charting a separate path, or in a more clearly defined relationship with you, you will know that they have made the transition. Some straight spouses can adapt in a relatively short period of time; others may require years, but they cannot truly move forward without letting go of their past assumptions. Their ability to emerge with a positive outlook may depend upon whether he or she believes we are each responsible for and capable of achieving our own happiness in life.

Adapted from the Straight Spouses Network

Coming-out to your dependant children

If you intend to act on your bisexual attractions, or if your children are likely to find out anyway, it is important that you tell them you are bisexual. It is never too soon to discuss it with them, but make sure you are in a good place emotionally before sharing the news. Children tend to be well-tuned to the emotional message that flows with their parents' words. They can sense your fear or emotional distress. If any discord in their home environment has put them on edge, knowing the truth may set them at ease.

If you are able to support each other, you and your spouse may wish to tell your children together. It would be reassuring if they could see you handling the situation as partners. Though children are often resistant to change, it is part of their reality as they learn, grow and mature into adults. Their ability to cope with change (in all forms) is tied to knowing that their parents will love and care for them no matter what life brings.

Tips on how to come-out to your dependant children

1) Choose a quiet time.

Explain that you have something very important to tell them. Minimize all distractions and call them into a room that is warm and comfortable for them. Their bedroom might be suitable, your bedroom might provide less distraction and allow you to sit at their level. The

living room or kitchen might be okay, but make sure there are no physical barriers (such as a table or chair) in the space between you.

2) **Be specific, but use age appropriate language and concepts.**

Tell them you are bisexual. Explain that you have always been bi, even when you were a child. *"Sometimes people who are bisexual understand their feelings when they're still children; others might not understand it until after they've grown-up."* Young children may have a short attention span. Try to keep your explanations brief.

3) **Talk to them about what it means to be bi; ask them to share what they already know.**

Young children probably have no understanding of the word bisexual; older children and teens may already have fixed ideas on what it means to be bi.

It's important for to give your children some meaning of bisexuality. Talk about different kinds of love, tell them that even though you love your spouse very much, you are also capable of loving people who are like you – another man (or woman) and there's a part of you that needs to know how that feels. You may have to use words like "romantic", "kissy" or "mushy" to help get your message across. Tell them there are many families with bisexual parents and that one day they will meet other children with bi moms and/or dads.

Encourage older children to share anything they already know or may have heard, even if they are worried it might hurt your feelings. You may have to debunk a few stereotypes, but initiating an open dialogue with them will allow you to handle future conversations with greater ease.

4) **Be prepared for clarifying questions.**

People frame new information with concepts they already understand. It is our way of lending clarity and relevance to new ideas; children are no different in this practice. Their questions may seem a little strange and you might wonder if your message has been lost. Remember, they are absorbing this information through their own filter and they are using *their* realm of experience to give it meaning. If your child says, "If you can love both, what's the problem?" he or she might be asking about divorce or separation. A child who asks if they should tell their friends might be worried about how this could change how people feel about them. Try reading their faces to see if you've actually answered their concerns.

5) **Let them know there may be some changes ahead.**

Explain that your family may experience some changes, but one thing that will never change is how much you and their mother love them. Let them know that as time passes, they may think of new questions and they can always come to you for help.

Source: Bigner and Bozett (1990) & colage.org

Helping your Dependant Children Adapt

With support, your children will adapt to the changes ahead, but it's important to understand, they will have a few special needs along the way.

- 1) They will need access to other children with gay, lesbian and/or bisexual parents to avoid the isolation that comes with feeling "different". Children can arrange for a pen pal from the COLAGE website: (Children Of Lesbians And Gays Everywhere) <http://www.colage.org>

and you can check if your town has a chapter of Family Pride which organizes social events for GLBT parents and children.

- 2) It is important to come-out several times and in several ways to your children. You may be their only reliable source on what it means to be bi. Don't hide who you are and do your best to remain open to their questions.
- 3) Talk to them about the misperceptions some people have about gay, lesbian and bisexual people. Homophobia and biphobia will touch their lives at some point and they will have to know how to manage these situations.
- 4) They too will have to "come-out" when they decide to tell their peers. They will need an age appropriate understanding of the key concepts in order to handle these discussions with confidence.
- 5) Your children may question their own sexual-orientation more deliberately. You can encourage them to listen to their heart and have faith in whatever feels right.

Source: Bigner and Bozett (1990) & colage.org

Coming-out to your adult children, friends & colleagues

Adult Children

Adult children have had time to develop their own ideas on bisexuality and they may be raising children with their spouse - and his or her attitudes and opinions.

If your child is in a long-term committed relationship, you may wish to tell him or her with their partner. Describe the emotional journey that led you to realize that you are bi. Be honest and frank. If there are details they will find out from someone else, be sure to tell them yourself.

Tell your children that you love them and you are thankful that you had them. Let them know you will try to answer their questions, but you may not have all the answers. Apologize for any pain they are feeling, but don't apologize for being bi.

Friends & Colleagues

Often times it is not just our loved ones that we must tell, but also our friends and possibly our work colleagues. Before coming-out to anyone, consider the impact it could have on your life – check the coming-out check list! ...Will this make my life better or worse? What kinds of reactions can I expect? Who else will automatically know? Some reactions will be positive, some negative. Be prepared for the possibility that some people may change how they interact with you. These people are having difficulty with your situation, or they could be afraid of saying the wrong thing. You can help these friends overcome their discomfort by just being yourself. If you care about these individuals, you may have it within you to become their teacher, but do not look to them for support. They are in need of your support. If you show them you are comfortable with who you are they will see the person they have always known. If you are open to their questions, let them know; but don't hesitate to tell them you don't have an answer, particularly if they wish to discuss topics you'd rather avoid. Your ability to remain open may help them over their hurdles. In time most of them usually come around.

Some may think that bisexuality is not normal. You may not be able to reach those who are deeply entrenched in this sort of thinking. You may have to part company with these

individuals, even if you care about them. Sharing your story may help, but realize that you will have to bring them a long way before they can accept that you are bi. If you encounter such attitudes in the workplace, report any discrimination to your employer at once. If you do not feel the situation is resolved, you can file a report with the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

What can I expect from life?

When you live in a way that is true to yourself, when you honour and value who you are, all good things in life are possible. Feel good about who you are and you will naturally look after the people and the goals that are important to you. There is no shame in being bisexual and you deserve the same happiness and quality of life as anyone else. Ultimately, we each decide how to realize our dreams, regardless of how great the challenge. But when we are able to surround ourselves with people who love and accept us, we have an excellent chance of overcoming any obstacle. Nothing is impossible.

Sometime families do not accept their sexually diverse family members and some of us use the term “chosen family” to refer to friends who have taken on a support role that is normally held by a blood relative. When family members cannot rise above their prejudice, it is important to form relationships with those who will stand with us. It’s not the same as finding acceptance within our own family, but it does help to insulate us from the prejudice and discrimination we may face in life. This is one of the reasons why rainbow communities tend to support their own.

If your family cannot accept you, you can find others who will. We are born into our families but we are not responsible for educating them, or opening their hearts and minds. It can take a long time to deal with the pain inflicted by parents and siblings who can’t get past their biphobia. Try to stay focused on the fact that they are limiting their own possibilities in life, not yours - unless that is your choice. You will feel the loss of their affection, but you must continue making decisions that are best for you. Try not to absorb negative comments; they are judging bisexuality, not you. Any previous goodwill they felt towards you is still within them, but their emotions are caged by their fear and misunderstanding of what it means to be bi. They will have great difficulty in seeing the situation this way; it may not be that simple for you either. Angry words and rejection can make you feel as though they have somehow erased you from their existence. This is an illusion; they will continue to love you, even if their biphobia prevents them from showing it.

Healthcare

The assumption that everyone is straight (heterosexism) and the possibility of discrimination touch almost every aspect of daily life, including issues pertaining to health-care. Dealing with insensitive or uneducated caregivers can be very frustrating and it can discourage us from keeping regular appointments with our doctor. Though health care practitioners should be informed on clinical care issues for bisexual men and women, some of them aren’t. Lack of knowledge (and in some cases sensitivity) may prevent practitioners from asking the necessary questions in a manner that invites honest and complete answers. This is the cornerstone of a healthy doctor-patient relationship. If you cannot achieve this level of comfort with your current caregiver, it’s time to find another one.

Finding the Right Doctor for You

So, how exactly can you go about finding the right doctor for you? You could canvas by phone to see which doctors have experience caring for bisexuals, or you could ask GLB friends for a recommendation. However, this may be an unrealistic approach in small towns or communities experiencing a shortage of physicians. If you would like to see a particular doctor, but he or she is not accepting new patients, write a letter asking to be put on that physician's waiting list. If you are comfortable doing so, explain your reasons for selecting him or her. Health Canada has identified the need to address access to care issues faced by sexual minorities; this physician may be willing to accommodate your request.

Taking charge of your health

We assume the same health risks as gays and lesbians, as well as those of heterosexuals. According to the Lesbian and Gay Medical Association, there are at least 10 things MSM (men who have sex with men) and WSW (women who have sex with women) should discuss with their doctor at least once a year.

10 Things MSM Should Discuss with Their Doctor

- 1) HIV/AIDS, Safe Sex
- 2) Substance Use
- 3) Depression/Anxiety
- 4) Hepatitis Immunization
- 5) STDs
- 6) Prostate/Testicular/Colon Cancer
- 7) Alcohol
- 8) Tobacco
- 9) Fitness (Diet & Exercise)
- 10) Anal Papiloma

Source: GLMA [Click here to read the full report.](#)

10 Things WSW Should Discuss with Their Doctor

- 1) Breast Cancer
- 2) Depression/Anxiety
- 3) Gynecological Cancer
- 4) Fitness (Diet and Exercise)
- 5) Substance Use
- 6) Tobacco
- 7) Alcohol
- 8) Domestic Violence
- 9) Osteoporosis
- 10) Heart Health

Source: GLMA [Click here to read the full report.](#)

Take Good Care!

Taking good care of our health begins with becoming better informed on the health care issues that affect us. Information that is intended for general distribution to the public does not always represent us. For instance, bisexual men and women fall into higher risk categories for many different types of cancer. One reason is that many of us find it difficult to access appropriate health care services but nevertheless; we owe it to ourselves to submit to routine check-ups and diagnostic procedures. In addition, certain social and cultural influences affect our risk of becoming ill. Our psychological make-up is also influenced by the fact that we are bisexual.

In dealing with and accepting our sexual orientation, our base levels of stress tend to be higher than our straight counterparts - and our coping strategies are not always the healthiest. Statistically, we smoke, drink and indulge in more high risk activities (unprotected sex, drug use), which can together affect our overall health. We also run a higher-than-average risk of developing disorders that affect body image like anorexia and bulimia in men and higher rates of obesity and cardiovascular disease in women. We must become active participants in caring for our health. This means staying informed and monitoring our physical and mental condition with the assistance of a qualified health care professional.

Useful information:

[Anal Cancer MSM – The LGBT Health Channel \(click\)](#)

[Cancer Facts for Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Men and Women \(click\)](#)
The American Cancer Society

[Cancer in Lesbian and Bisexual Women – The LGBT Health Channel \(click\)](#)

[Getting Physical: Body-image disorders in gay men](#) – Benjamin Ryan, *Gay.com*

[Health and Wellness in the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered and Two-Spirit Communities](#) – *Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition, 2004.*

[Lesbians' weight patterns may trigger more heart disease \(click\)](#)
Sunnybrae Women's Health Sciences Centre, 2003.

Practice Safer Sex

It is important to feel comfortable discussing safer sex options with your doctor. Despite the dramatic reduction in sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the late 1980s, our rate of contracting such illnesses still remains considerably higher than for the average person. Safer sex can mean different things to different people. The following links will provide information on the risks associated with different types of sexual behaviour and/or suggestions on how to reduce your risk of disease.

[Health Canada: Sexually Transmitted Infections \(click\)](#)

[Safer Sex for MSM – The LGBT Health Channel \(click\)](#)

[Safer Sex for Lesbian Women – The LGBT Health Channel \(click\)](#)

STDs

Life threatening diseases like HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis, in addition to the curable but common varieties like gonorrhea, chlamydia and most strikingly, syphilis, are on the rise among gay men. (Health Canada, 2005). Gonorrhea is of particular concern because in gay men, it is showing signs of resistance to the typically prescribed antibiotics. [Click here](#) to read the full-report from the U.S. Center for Disease Control. Your doctor should be aware of your sexual orientation, especially if he or she is going to provide advice or write a prescription for an STD.

HPV: A Commonly Underestimated Threat

HPV (human papilloma virus) is well-known for the treatable warts that are produced by various strains of the virus however; HPV can be present in the body for several years with or without the appearance of warts. It is often transmitted to an unsuspecting partner without the knowledge of the carrier and the consequences can have far more impact than the warts for which it's known. In men, HPV can significantly increase the chances of developing cancer of the penis or anus. It is transmitted by skin to skin contact. Practicing safer sex and submitting to routine screening for these cancers (anal pap) are the only ways to manage these risks.

[Information on STDs for all Sexual Orientations \(Health Canada\) \(click\)](#)

[Info on STD's from the B. C. Centre for Disease Control \(click\)](#)

[It's Your Health: Male & Female Condoms – Health Canada \(click\)](#)

[Public Health Agency of Canada – STIs, Sexual Health Facts and Information \(click\)](#)

[STD Help/info Line \(Health Canada\) – Toll-free phone numbers \(click\)](#)

Homophobic Harassment, Violence & Domestic Abuse

We all face the very real possibility of becoming a victim of homophobic violence or harassment. If you feel that a specific threat exists, file a report with or get some advice from the local police. If you are dealing with a workplace harassment issue, report the offense to your employer. If the problem persists, file a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Do not blame yourself; being bisexual is not the problem, biphobia is.

[Information on how to file a complaint with the Canadian Human Rights Commission \(click\)](#)

Some threats do not come from strangers or people we wish to avoid; sometimes they exist in the relationships we hope will provide us with comfort and protection. If you are in an abusive relationship, tell someone who can help; do not keep it a secret. The abuse will not stop and you could sustain serious emotional and physical injury. You are not helping your partner by remaining quiet. Here are some links that might help you, or someone you know who is in this situation:

Articles on understanding abuse:

[Abuse in Gay Male Relationships: A Discussion Paper \(click\)](#)

- By Kevin Kirkland, Ph.D., Health Canada, 2004.

[Abuse in Lesbian Relationships: Information and Resources – Health Canada, 1998 \(click\)](#)

[Abuse in Same-sex Relationships - The Coalition Against Same Sex Partner Abuse \(click\)](#)

- *Life on Brian's Beat*

[Intimate Partner Abuse Against Men – NCFV – Public Health Agency of Canada \(click\)](#)

[Myths and Misconceptions about Violence and Abuse in Gay Male Relationships \(click\)](#)
- B.C. Institute Against Family Violence

[Wife Abuse: The Impact on Children – NCFV – Public Health Agency of Canada \(click\)](#)

Managing stress

Our ability to manage stress is measured by how effectively we can release negative emotions. Bisexual men and women experience a higher than average dose of daily stress, so it is vital that we choose a lifestyle that promotes vitality; otherwise, we can wind-up struggling with our sense of well-being and eventually run the risk of developing a stress related illness.

Effective stress management usually requires a conscious effort. Cigarettes, alcohol and drugs are commonly available in social settings – when we most want to forget our problems and enjoy good friends; it takes a thoughtful, committed approach to maintain an exercise or meditation routine.

Try to find healthy and enjoyable ways to release stress. Physical exercise is one of the best, but creative outlets are also good and so is volunteer work. Speaking to someone who is supportive can always help you over the rough spots, but it is important to invest your time in personal coping strategies as well.

Beware of short-term solutions that compromise you in any way, even over-the-counter medication can become a problem. If you feel that you require something to help you sleep or to help manage the symptoms of depression, talk to your doctor about developing a coping strategy. This may or may not include medication, but it should not lead to new problems down the road.

Suicide alert – watch for the signs and stay alive!

Although figures vary, an estimated 30% of gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans-identified (GLBT) youth will attempt suicide. It might help you to know that most of us learn to manage the challenges associated with coming-out and living visibly. It's not always easy, but you have every reason to believe you can live a happy and productive life. It's normal for anyone to have fleeting thoughts of suicide when we're under tremendous stress however; there are some definite warning signs that it's time to get help.

Call your local suicide prevention hotline if you can answer yes to any of these questions:

- 1) Do your thoughts seem to go where they want?
- 2) Do you experience mental images that you can't seem to escape?
- 3) Do you find yourself mentally transfixed, then jolted *awake* by disturbing thoughts or visions?
- 4) Have you actually formulated a plan for committing suicide, even if you don't think you'd use it?
- 5) Have you made a mental checklist of things you'd do before committing suicide?
- 6) Do suicidal thoughts give you a sense of relief?

Things You Should Know about Suicide

1. **Suicide is not a choice.** When pain or anguish become unbearable, our instincts naturally devise an escape plan that might push us down a path that we would not otherwise choose. When we cannot see any realistic options, this path may lead us dangerously close to suicide.
2. **Prolonged depression will alter your brain chemistry**, making it more difficult to overcome without help. Suicidal thoughts can persist even if we are consciously trying to put them out of our mind.

Don't be shy about calling a suicide prevention line in your area. It may be easier to speak with a stranger over the phone, than with someone you know face-to-face. People who answer these calls are ready to listen and guide you to additional resources that may help.

There is a great deal of online information available to anyone who is struggling with their sexual orientation (see the links at the end of this document for additional resource materials), but reading does not provide the same peace-of-mind as sharing your concerns with another person, especially one who has faced a similar situation. PFLAG Canada Chapter meetings can provide you with an opportunity to meet other bisexuals, who will be at various points in their coming-out experience.

Canadian Suicide Prevention Hotlines

[Kids Help Phone \(click\)](#): The fastest way to get help is to dial:

1-800-668-6868. No one is too old to call!

Your call is completely confidential; they don't have call display. Trained counselors are ready (24/7) to answer your questions.

[Centre for Suicide Prevention \(click\)](#) - A Canada-wide directory for telephone assistance

Things you may hear

Knowing and understanding the language of sexual diversity can lend clarity to the information you read and/or share. As you become more comfortable with this new vocabulary, you will undoubtedly absorb words that pertain to gender identity. This knowledge will help you to understand and embrace the vast community of people touched by sexual and gender diversity.

Common Words Associated with Sexual Orientation

Asexual, bisexual, gay, homosexual, lesbian, pansexual, queer, questioning, straight

Myths & Stereotypes

Whenever humanity has set aside discussion on important issues, mythology can take the shape of truth. Sexual orientation defines several important aspects of the human condition and people tend to fear what they cannot understand, especially when it concerns other people. Unfortunately, this means the most damaging misconceptions can become the most widely believed and the hardest to eliminate. Today, more people are engaging in healthy

discussion on sexual diversity. Many of the old myths are losing credibility, but here are a few that remain:

1) I don't know any lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans-identified people.

You may not know of any who are "out", but you most certainly know someone who is "closeted" (hiding their sexual orientation from others).

2) You can tell who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans-identified by the way they act.

Sometimes you can, and other times you can't. Usually, you can only "spot" them if they want to be identified. Gay, lesbian bisexual and straight people can demonstrate any mix of masculine, feminine or androgynous mannerisms. "Gender expression" is a separate component of sexual identity. It does not influence one's attraction to others.

3) Bisexuality doesn't really exist. People who say they're bisexual just haven't decided whether they're gay or straight.

People who are bisexual have the capacity for romantic, emotional, and/or sexual attractions to both genders (female and male). Sometimes gays and lesbians temporarily claim bisexuality as their orientation. This is because many find "questioning" uncomfortable and sometimes it helps to claim an identify that seems close. People who are truly bisexual don't change their orientation, regardless of how others perceive them (based on the partners they choose). A bisexual person with a same sex-partner life partner may be perceived as homosexual, but he or she is still bi.

4) Bisexuality is just a trendy fad.

We do not choose our sexual orientation; it is a natural part of who we are. While trends in "sexual experimentation" may exist, they affect all people and all orientations.

5) Bisexuals are only capable of having a committed relationship with the opposite sex!

Bisexual people are just as likely to have committed, monogamous relationships with same-sex partners as with members of the opposite sex.

6) I don't know why bisexuals have to make such a big deal about equal rights; gays and lesbians have taken care of the big concerns like same-sex marriage, adoption and human rights.

First of all, it's important to understand that the bisexual population has played a vital role in the push for equality and yet, biphobia exists in the gay and lesbian community as well as in the general population. Confusion and myth still cloud how bisexuality is perceived; we have a lot to do to educate people about biphobia.

7) Gay and bisexual men are more likely to abuse children.

Most child abusers (over 90%) are heterosexual men, many who will abuse both girls and boys, often beginning with members of their own family. Male predators who target boys are usually not interested in romantic, loving, emotional, and sexual relationships with adult men because their attraction is a form of paraphilia (psychosexual disorder), not a homosexual orientation.

8) Being lesbian, gay, or bisexual is wrong!

The medical community dismissed the idea that homosexuality was a mental disorder in 1973. Both the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) and the American Psychological Association (APA) consider same-sex attractions to be perfectly normal. Canada is now the 4th country to legalize same-sex marriage along with Belgium, The Netherlands, and Spain. Homosexuality is not the problem; the problem is thinking we should all be straight!

9) It is against God's will to become sexually involved with members of your own sex!

There are many opinions about homosexuality among the various world faiths however; most would agree that intolerance and hatred are wrong. Many religions welcome gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans-identified, and intersexual members into their communities of faith.

10) Homosexuality and bisexuality are the result of either early problems in the brain, or certain parenting styles immediately following birth.

Nobody knows (with absolute certainty) why some people are gay, lesbian or bisexual and others are not. Most researchers believe that it cannot be pinned to one single factor; it is likely the result of a combination of social, psychological and biological influences. Recent literature points to genetics; research has shown that our sexual orientation is “pre-wired” before birth. Most in the scientific community regard homosexuality as a natural variation of the human condition, not a choice of lifestyle.

11) Why do people in same-sex relationships have to flaunt their sexuality?

This begs the question, “What is flaunting?” Straight people often place a photo of their partner in their workspace, they comfortably kiss hello or goodbye, they hold hands when they go for a walk and they wear matching rings to symbolize their union. Is this flaunting?

In Western society, whether you’re straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans, everyone has the right to respectfully demonstrate affection in public. No one is exempt from this right and no one is less deserving because of his or her minority status.

Unfortunately, sexual minorities often find it difficult to comfortably express affection. For instance, a woman drops her purse at the grocery store. Her same-sex partner picks it up; she smiles and says, “Thank-you”. What if she says, “Thank-you Dear” instead? She knows that several may turn and give them an uncomfortable stare. Some may even engage in whispered heckling, or harass them on the way to their car. Is she flaunting her sexuality?

Social scientists use the term “heterosexual privilege” to describe the behaviours that cannot be comfortably duplicated in public by same-sex couples.

Some people believe GLBT persons flaunt their sexuality during Gay Pride events. There are many reasons why people participate in Pride. Here are just a few:

- It is an opportunity for them (and their families) to safely participate in community events. Many live in secrecy to protect their safety, job, living arrangements and dignity.
- They wish to commemorate times when they or other GLBT persons have faced persecution.
- It is an opportunity to feel normal and accepted within their community.

- Many straight family members participate to show support for their GLBT loved ones.

12) Employment equity gives jobs to unqualified people; why do sexual minorities feel the need to demand special rights!

Basic human rights are not special rights. The aim of employment equity is to end discrimination, not grant special privileges. Legally, on-the-job performance cannot be measured using one's gender, race, culture, religion or sexual orientation. Taking steps to ensure that you are assessed fairly is not a special right; it is a human right.

13) Why does the GLBT population want to bring their issues into the school system? I don't want my kids exposed to this, even as an extension of the sex-ed program.

Very few parents know the facts on sexual orientation or gender identity. Those who talk to their children about sex usually do not include these topics in their discussions.

In Canada, most students will receive some education on sexual diversity, but most of their ideas will come from a mix of pop-culture, family and peer influences. They are exposed to a limited amount of factual information. Homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying remain a problem in Canadian schools and gay and trans youth run a high-risk of depression, substance abuse and suicide. It is a tough way to enter one's adult years. Furthermore, almost everyone knows or meets someone who is gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans-identified or intersexual in his or her lifetime. It is easier to form healthy relationships when prejudice is not a factor.

14) Bisexual people don't know what they want. They will partner with anyone who is willing to have sex with them.

A person's sexual orientation has nothing to do with their ability to remain monogamous, or how frequently they wish to have sex. Bisexual people are not confused and their orientation does not compel them to partner with both genders at once. They can genuinely fall in love with either a man or a woman; their partner's gender does not matter to them. They often face discrimination from those (gay, lesbian and straight) who do not understand bisexuality. Many believe that sexual orientation and gender identity exist as opposites (gay/straight, male/female); it simply isn't true. Sexual orientation, as with all human traits, exists on a continuum, the same as varying degrees of brown hair, intelligence, height, weight, creativity, etc.

15) AIDS is a gay disease!

The population with the fastest growing rate of contracting HIV/AIDS is actually heterosexual women. Interestingly, The Canadian Blood Services will refuse blood donated from homosexuals because they consider them a high-risk population for AIDS. On the contrary, heterosexual women are not discriminated against when they offer to donate blood.

In the early 1980s, condoms were used mainly to prevent pregnancy; those who knowingly could not conceive had little or no experience using them. The existence of HIV/AIDS was announced with limited understanding and many people underestimated how easily the disease could be transmitted. As more gay and bisexual men fell victim, HIV/AIDS was mischaracterized as a "gay" disease, further diminishing the importance of prevention within the heterosexual population. Although condom use has dramatically increased, many still find it is a difficult subject to broach with their partner.

HIV/AIDS is a concern for every human being; no one can claim immunity. It is everyone's responsibility to stop the spread of this deadly disease.

16) In a same-sex relationship, one person assumes the male role and the other one plays the female.

Sexual orientation has nothing to do with a person's gender-role. Gay, lesbian and bisexual people partner for the same reasons as heterosexual couples: love, sexual attraction, companionship and common goals or ideals. Two masculine men can make excellent life-partners, so can two feminine women. Gender-role can be an issue for someone who is struggling with his or her gender-identity, but trans people are also gay, lesbian, bisexual or straight.

Words That Hurt

Some people may use words to hurt or embarrass you. You cannot control what others say however, understanding where the words come from may help reduce the impact. Remember, these are just words and though they may hurt, it's important to consider who is saying them.

People (of all ages) who are sexually immature, or who have a limited understanding of sexuality, may actually believe that being bisexual is not natural. Our sexuality is a wholly integrated part of who we are and some people are uncomfortable and intimidated by sexual realities they cannot comprehend. Those who are polite will simply keep their ideas private, while others (the particularly rude ones) may use insults to reduce you to a status that makes sense to them. It is wrong, small minded and unfair, but it happens. Early philosophers first posed the idea that earth was round in the 4th century. Columbus set sail some 1200 years later, with most people still believing the earth was flat. Progress may seem slow, but fortunately we're well beyond 1492.

The following are common examples of words that hurt:

Bitch, cow, cupcake, dyke*, faggot, fairy, fruit, pansy, sissy, queer* (some people legitimately identify as a dyke or queer, but others still consider it offensive)

Support

Support is important for everyone; we all need someone to listen to our concerns. Support is not the same as acquiring new information that we can find online, or in books and pamphlets. Information feeds our minds and sustains us intellectually. While it can provide us with certain tools for coping, we are still alone in our quest. "Support" connects us to other people, which is an inherent human need. Being "closeted" is an isolating experience. You may find yourself avoiding friends or social settings that could require you to talk about yourself. This isolation can emotionally disconnect us from others, making it hard to maintain healthy relationships in all areas of our life. Support helps to heal this vulnerability and re-opens important human connections that sustain our overall well-being. If friends and family members cannot provide you with this vital link, it is very important that you find others who can. There are people who are willing to listen; you just have to reach out.

We may need support but we can also give it. All members of your family will require a certain amount of support and a willingness to listen may help them through the adjustment period.

However, be mindful that you are not shouldering more pain than you can handle. They will have to figure out some of the answers for themselves. Some people will ask questions using insensitive language, be patient with them. Others will ask things you cannot answer; be patient with yourself.

Hope

When you live in fear of disappointing others, you cannot please yourself. Denying who you are will eventually make you feel angry, trapped or unworthy of happiness. These emotions will touch all areas of your life, affecting your work and your relationships with others.

No matter how your situation looks right now, things will change. You may believe it can't get any worse, or you may be facing the uncertainty of coming-out to family and friends. Believe it or not, this is a time to be hopeful.

Life is constantly changing, it never stops. The changes you are experiencing will propel you forward on the path that was intended for you. Being bisexual will not limit your choices or potential. You are still writing your life-story and only you can decide where your path will take you. If things seem overwhelming right now remember, time is on your side. Slow down and deal with new challenges one step-at-a-time - and only when you are ready. Look at how a situation might unfold and try to prepare for a variety of outcomes. Don't forget, most people will become more accepting with time. Also, there are resources available online or through your local Chapter of PFLAG Canada. You may wish to speak with a PFLAG Canada Contact or attend a monthly Chapter meeting. It can be helpful to hear how others have grown to accept themselves or their loved ones. You will find the courage to move forward; you have already demonstrated that much by coming to this website.

Links & Resources: (under construction)

Books Worth Reading

Links to other Support Sites

Community Support Information

Reference Information

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